

# Massive rescue effort across stricken areas

By GREG RETSINAS

Raleigh Bureau Chief

RALEIGH - The eastern 43 counties of North Carolina, most in a wide swath stretching from Interstate 95 to the coast, were "closed" indefinitely, state officials said Friday.

Swollen rivers overtook hundreds of roads, including large sections of Interstates 95 and 40, and dozens of motorists trying to cross flooded streets had to flee from their cars in order to avoid being swept away.

Although most curfews were lifted in the Wilmington area, many remained intact in many eastern counties. More than 1,500 people are believed stranded.

Gov. Jim Hunt appealed to church groups, volunteer organizations and others to prepare to lend a hand once floodwaters recede, calling for a statewide day of prayer on Sunday.

"We just don't have enough help," Gov. Hunt said.

Across the larger region of eastern North Carolina, the situation prompted state and federal officials to dispatch more than 50 helicopters and 2,200 National Guard personnel in search-and-rescue missions. State helicopters were employed in Duplin, Edgecombe, Jones, Nash, Onslow and Wilson counties to identify people trapped on rooftops, while Coast Guard and state helicopters and

Please see RESCUES on page 4A

## Rescues

Continued from page 1A

boats were then dispatched to pick up the people.

Additional helicopters from Texas, Florida and Georgia were expected to arrive Saturday, and officials said search-and-rescue missions would continue around the clock through the weekend.

In Nash County, 70 people huddled in a garage waiting to be rescued, while more than 300 people were rescued Friday in nearby Edgecombe County. County officials said another 400 people were still stranded there.

Despite sunshine over much of the state Friday and good weather expected for the weekend, state officials feared more bad news in the days to come.

"It will be a beautiful day in North Carolina, and everybody will want to go to the coast. But we still have roads flooded. We are pleading with people not to go east of 95," said emergency management spokesman Renee Hoffman.

Communities that are flooded will likely remain wet for several days - and powerless. Across eastern North Carolina, more than 500,000 people were still without power Friday, and Carolina Power & Light officials said they would have to wait to restore power in many areas until the roads became passable.

And to the southeast of Raleigh, especially near Goldsboro and Kinston, the situation was expected to worsen as rivers continue to rise.

The Cape Fear and Upper Neuse rivers should return within their banks by Monday, but the Tar and Lower Neuse rivers will keep rising for at least five more days, state meteorologist Ron Wall said.

"Things are not getting better, they're getting worse," said state



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

**Joe Edwards checks damage** (above) to U.S. 421 near Delway on Friday after water washed away about 15 feet of the road. At left, Anthony Johnson holds a tow rope as he waits for a truck to pull a neighbor's moving van to higher ground in Garland.



public safety director Richard Moore in Raleigh.

It was unclear late Friday when major roads, including I-95, would be

cleared. The north-south highway is closed between Petersburg, Va., and Rocky Mount, a distance of more than 100 miles. Motorists will be de-

toured this weekend using I-85 and U.S. 1, although officials pleaded with people not to drive through the eastern part of the state at all.

Virginia transportation workers are assisting by detouring southbound motorists away from I-95 to I-85.

Also, most state parks and historic sites in eastern North Carolina will be closed this weekend. In most cases, the attractions will be closed because the surrounding roads are flooded.